

## **Homeless Shelter Workers in Midwestern Urban Centers**

### **Archie Green Fellows Project AFC2016034**

#### **Oral History of Jennifer Sgro, Nurse Practitioner with The Night Ministry,**

**Chicago, Illinois on October 20, 2016**

#### **Summary of Interview**

Jennifer (Jen) Sgro works as a Nurse Practitioner with The Night Ministry located at 4711 North Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60640. The Night Ministry, founded in 1976, provides housing and healthcare to people who are homeless or living in extreme poverty. Jen provides healthcare on an Outreach Bus that travels to a different low-income Chicago neighborhood each evening, Monday through Friday.

This interview took place in a study room in the DePaul University library.

#### **Interview Log**

- 00:00:01 Introduction
- 00:00:26 Jen's job title, activities; Nurse Practitioner providing healthcare from a healthcare outreach bus that travels to a different Chicago neighborhood each night;
- 00:01:16 She works 4-5 nights per week on the bus; other times she visits a shelter and the Chicago Health Initiative started by Jacqueline Hayes (Wednesday night meals in downtown Catholic Charities building) to be available for healthcare concerns;
- 00:02:42 Describes bus healthcare set-up; It has:
- A small exam room for standard care;
  - No capacity for x-rays;
  - Ability to take blood pressure, or give eye exams;
- 00:03:42 Discussion of typical health issues her client's face:
- Chronic pain issues due to life hardships;
  - Asthma and breathing issues;
  - Mental health concerns;
  - Substance abuse issues;
- 00:06:06 Jen notes that tobacco use is high in her client population; COPD, hypertension, and heart disease; the cost of cigarettes is \$13/pack in Chicago, so most buy one cigarette at a time;
- 00:07:24 Description of her use of medications:
- She's limited in ability to give meds other than asthma inhalers, ibuprofen, Tylenol and hot patches for pain;
  - People don't seek heavier drugs from her;
  - She can provide braces for a joint pain;

- Jen connects with mental health clinics, but budget cuts in Illinois closed area mental health clinics, impacting whether people stayed on their mental health medications;
  - Refers people to Thresholds, a nonprofit for people with mental health or chemical use issues; and Community Health Center, a clinic offering free care;
- 00:12:47 Description of the Night Ministry's long-standing relationship with the community and other offerings: a meal (donated by volunteers); a case manager for help with housing, I.D., etc.; and basic human connection, which is what some people come for;
- 00:14:52 Interviewer notes she visited the bus last night and people asked for and expressed a fondness for Jen; Jen's description of differences between this job and traditional nursing clinics and hospitals;
- 00:16:28 How Jen came to this work; previously worked in genomic research; desired to work with underserved populations;
- 00:18:59 Description of different neighborhoods that the bus visits;
- Uptown;
  - Southside;
  - Westside, Pilsen and Humboldt neighborhoods;
- 00:23:45 Challenges of the job are many; broken systems; human suffering; desire to make a difference;
- 00:26:44 2016 presidential election; animosity of politics today;
- 00:28:02 Dealing with critical medical issues; calling 9-1-1;
- 00:31:29 Measuring success in her work is difficult; sometimes wonders if she has been helpful; story of recently helping a woman get an apartment;
- 00:33:58 Funding for her position is largely from private donations (rather than government grants/contracts);
- 00:34:22 Her work style and job expectations; no required number of patients she must see; she can spend time listening to the patient; story about a distrustful patient; letting the patient feel in control;
- 00:41:15 Jen's philosophy; she strives to empower people; the lack of basic healthcare knowledge that the average person has; wonders about doing more education and prevention;
- 00:47:02 Whether she can help people afford medication; example of a woman's need for a cushioned hand-grip for a cane;
- 00:48:27 The Night Ministry's Street Medicine team is another, separate healthcare program; it assists with those who can't even make it to the bus; some people won't leave their belongings for fear of theft;
- 00:50:47 How her work is affect by larger events such as weather or legislation; the closing of the community mental health clinics was critical; in her 11 years in Chicago, the tent cities under a viaduct feels new; presently hundreds of people living in a tent city; the Affordable Care Act isn't working as planned; she would support single-payer healthcare;
- 00:58:09 History of her position; healthcare was acknowledged as an early need at The Night Ministry

00:59:30 Rewarding parts of her work; each night she knows she makes a positive difference in someone's life; story of a lady with multiple issues who Jen doesn't know how to help; sometimes people just need to be listened and maybe that is part of what "healing" is;

01:05::00 Discussion of the way forward; the need to continue to improve systems;

01:08.00 End